



Chapter 1

A Customer Service Orientation

What is this toolkit about? Who is it for and why should it be used? These questions and other general questions about service to customers are addressed in this first chapter of the Customer Service in Permitting Toolkit.

What is EPA's Customer Service Program?

On September 11, 1993, President Clinton issued Executive Order 12862, Setting Customer Service Standards," to all customers.

The order led EPA to adopt the following vision for the Agency's customer service efforts:

As we achieve our mission of protecting public health and the environment, EPA people are becoming customer-focused, our products and services customer-driven, and our customers satisfied.

EPA's Customer Service Strategy includes seven elements:

- Setting customer service standards
- Publicizing the standards
- Establishing measures and tracking systems and providing measurement assistance
- Building staff capacity by making training and information available
- Involving staff in the development of customer service programs
- Benchmarking EPA against world class service
- Providing managers assistance and actionable information

How Will Things Be Different Now?

As a customer-focused agency, we hold ourselves accountable for providing service that rivals the best in the private sector. We have a set of standards against which we measure ourselves, the Six Principles of Customer Service:

- 1) Be helpful! Listen to your customers.
- 2) Respond to all phone calls by the end of the next business day.
- 3) Respond to all correspondence within 10 business days.
- 4) Make clear, timely, accurate information accessible.
- 5) Work collaboratively with partners to improve product and services.

6) Involve customers and use their ideas and input.

To implement these principles, EPA identified eight core processes that are most important to our customers:

- Permitting
- Enforcement and Compliance Assistance
- State, Tribal and Local Grants
- Partnership Programs
- Public Access
- Pesticides Registration
- Research Grants
- Rulemaking

The workgroup prepared this Permitting Toolkit to help you improve customer service within the permitting core process.

Who Should Use This Toolkit -- and Why?

This toolkit is not just for EPA. Many non federal environmental agencies helped us make it a resource for any permitting authority — states, tribal, local, or federal. It can help all of us to provide better environmental and public health protection.

Like any toolkit, it is not a mandate, but a set of tools that all permitting programs can use. The toolkit describes how you can gather reliable feedback from your customers, and how some agencies have redesigned their permitting programs to meet customer needs. Asking customers about their needs, expectations, and experiences enables us to measure whether they are satisfied with our services. And customer satisfaction can save resources in the long run by avoiding unnecessary and time-consuming confrontation.

The bottom line? Finding out customer opinions about what we do and how we do it will help us improve our products and services. Customers will notice and value these improvements, learning that government agencies can be more responsive to customer needs.

What Are Our Services?

Permits describes what facilities must do to meet environmental health and environmental safety standards. In many cases, EPA authorizes or delegates state, tribal, and local governments to issue permits. (We will refer to both these in this Toolkit as “delegating.”) In jurisdictions where delegation has not occurred, EPA issues permits directly. Permits control facility emissions into the air (e.g., permits to modify or construct, and operating permits), protect surface and groundwater (e.g., national pollution discharge elimination, storm water runoff, underground waste injection) and ensure the safe management of hazardous waste (e.g., treatment, storage and disposal).

Who are Our Permitting Customers?

EPA's *Hearing the Voice of the Customer - Customer Feedback and Customer Satisfaction Measurement Guidelines* define a customer as someone who directly relies on a provider for a product or service. Customers are defined on the basis of the service or product they receive. In permitting, a customer may:

- have a direct relationship with the permitting authority
- receive one or more services or products from the permitting authority
- be directly affected by the actions of the permitting authority
- be an employee of the permitting authority, acting as an internal customer

While it is possible to identify and label many customer groups that are interested in the permitting process, this toolkit focuses on two major groups — “interested and impacted parties” and “permit applicants.” Interested and impacted parties are those individuals, interest groups, communities, states, or tribes that raise a concern or have comments regarding the permit action. Permit applicants are seeking approval from EPA or a delegated authority to conduct a regulated activity.

This toolkit describes the relationships among the interested and impacted parties, the permit applicants, and the permitting authorities. We also briefly discuss internal relationships among the permitting authorities (EPA headquarters, regional offices and delegated authorities).

Table 1.1 outlines the relationship between the customers and their service providers in the permitting process.

Table 1.1
Customers and Their Service Provider

Customer	Service Provider
EPA Regional Office	EPA Headquarters
Delegated State, Tribal or Local Government	EPA Regional Office
Permit Applicant	EPA Regional Office or Delegated State, Tribal or Local Government
Interested and Impacted Parties	EPA Regional Office or Delegated State, Tribal or Local Government

Because these customers often have differing and conflicting needs, delivering customer service in permitting becomes a complicated matter. However, as stated in the “Blair House Papers” (January 1997), an agency desiring to be a customer-driven organization must continuously ask its customers

what they want. Experience shows we can identify the needs of the permitting customers and work to satisfy those needs while still carrying out our mission to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment.

How is Quality Related to Services Provided?

Figure 1.1 shows that customer satisfaction depends both on the services we deliver and the way we deliver them. Obviously, we should deliver services in a “right way” rather than in a “wrong way.” But, perhaps you haven’t considered that the services you provide may not be the ones your customers want. Imagine the reservoir of potential services that go untapped because we are out of touch with our customers, spending unnecessary time doing the wrong things, or doing the right things in a wrong way. A customer-focused organization should know whether its services meet customer needs, and take advantage of opportunities to invest in newer and better services.

Figure 1.1 Services and Delivery Model

